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Cramping our covert style

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The answer to the question as to why so many spy cases have surfaced in the news in recent months is clear. At the bidding of the White House, the intelligence community is bringing as many cases of espionage out into the open as possible. The move is a political decision, intended to diminish criticism of the intelligence community by the public as well as by Congress. It has produced many results, not all of them good.

On the positive side, it has alerted a larger number of Americans to the fact that foreign intelligence services can and are infiltrating domestic security arenas. It will also serve to frighten some prospective hostile U.S. agents into thinking that U.S. central intelligence is more potent and cognizant of agent networks and defectors than is actually the case. Furthermore, it has enhanced the stature of the FBI, especially among the Washington elite.

On the negative side, it has tended to cast great suspicion on the CIA and the military as secure operations. It also has made it much more difficult for the CIA and the military, who operate overseas, to set up or effect walk-in, provocation, or penetration operations, because now that the Soviets have been alerted to the new crackdown, they will improve their operational methods.

Finally, professionals in the intelligence field, overseas or at home, innocent or guilty, are now severely criticized for neglect of their tasks.

This epitomizes the general lack of understanding of the nature of espionage — and particularly counterespionage — among policymakers, politicians, and the public. Experienced personnel charged with the conduct of the intelligence activities of the United States are being worn down by the political rhetoric and pressures to "perform" in today's high-profile environment.

The main beneficiaries of the counterespionage circus are journalists and academic critics of intelligence. Espionage is the name and criticism is the game!

The fact is that our intelligence professionals have not neglected their duties. On the contrary, they feel it is they who have been neglected. Previous administrations, especially the Carter experiment

with government, took a very mechanical/technological view of intelligence, believing that people were obsolete and that it was possible to safeguard our national security in a deodorized intelligence atmosphere of electronic intercepts and photographs.

Only toward the end of Mr. Carter's administration did the slow recognition come that people, not machines, were responsible for the woes brought down upon the heads of the leaders of the United States. It took an ayatollah to alarm them and the invasion of Afghanistan to bring the point home.

Yet, despite the recognition of this unalterable fact of intelligence life, in the last five years only minimal improvements have been made. The bureaucracy still does not believe in the information provided by people. Nonetheless, even after years of emphasis on highly sophisticated technical advances in the fields of Comint, Elint and Signint, designed to complement the communications, electronic, and signal intelligence body of knowledge of the United States against its enemies — and sometimes its friends — when a "new threat" of spies and terrorists emerges, the Pentagonese catchword "Humint" dominates the press. This in turn breeds a new subculture of self-appointed "experts" in intelligence and counterintelli-

gence, virtually none of whom ever participated in the types of operations they critique.

The hostile, high-profile climate will produce accelerated retirements among dedicated, capable, and experienced professionals in the coming months. Many eligible to retire have remained in place out of a sense that things will get better; but their hopes are waning. It must be made clear by the leadership of this country that it supports the recruitment, training, and employ-

ment of human resources in the intelligence community with understanding and faith in their integrity.

Past abuses in the government's dairy programs did not prevent the free flow of milk; however, perceived but unproven allegations in the information-gathering business have resulted in a data-dearth that comforts our enemies. Our leaders also must show some recognition of the value of the clandestine. Those who serve in our modern-day shadows deserve no less.

Finally, the decision to "go public" with certain espionage cases paradoxically will lead to a weakening of intelligence successes for the United States. The favorite tactic of professional counterintelligence officers is, if at all possible, to take advantage of discoveries of espionage by either dou-

bling the hostile agent or, if the opportunity presents itself, utilizing the agent for deception or disinformation purposes.

It is not too difficult to speculate what might have been accomplished to really pay back the Soviets in a manner most costly to them if, for example, advantage had been taken of the Walker family network. Handled in a sophisticated and time-intensive and effort-absorbing manner, the United States could have set Soviet countertechnology on a wild goose chase for many years.

However, intelligence and its counter, coupled with terrorism, are currently center-stage in Washington, thus disallowing the opportunity for these sorts of necessary "dirty tricks" to go on. Nonetheless, long after the market is saturated with millions of words regarding these topics, the same problems will persist. Although the president spoke proudly of the foiled attempts of terrorists, showing his recognition of clandestine methods, there are still many who are subverting the intelligence process by insistence on oversight, observance of artificial and counterproductive guidelines, and strict maintenance of methods and procedures pleasing to bookkeepers and congressional accountants but detrimental to fulfillment of intelligence missions.

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